



## Connecting the inner and the outer worlds: Strategies for civic learning

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**Conference Track:** Higher education student outcomes

**Format:** Symposium

### Summary

This session will explore what it takes to support students' development into civic actors. We will begin by exploring how participants understand "civic engagement," "civic learning," and "civic action." We will then share recent research findings from two linked civic education programs on the same campus. Our three studies question how a set of pedagogical approaches—including learning communities, contemplative practice, and purposeful dialogue across differences—impacts students' awareness of self, their understanding of people different from themselves, and their capacity to act as agents of social change. We will conclude by asking how our findings relate to participants' knowledge of strategies for developing students' self-awareness, ability to take the perspectives of others, and capacity for action.

The session will begin with participants free-writing in response to questions about their views of civic engagement and civic action. We then transition to conversation among the panelists about how each of us understands these terms and how they inform our approaches to teaching and learning. After presenting our research, we will ask participants to review their original statements in pairs; to highlight key elements in their knowledge of contemplative practice, dialogue, and learning communities as strategies for civic learning; and to identify other strategies they believe are crucial. Following this brief “pair/share,” the presenters and audience will engage in conversation about the issues raised.

This symposium carries the conference theme, “Connected Knowing,” into three questions:

- 1) How are knowledge of self and knowledge of others connected?
- 2) How are these two forms of knowledge connected to knowing how to work toward a more just and democratic society?
- 3) What strategies help students develop these kinds of knowledge?

Understanding oneself, understanding the social world, and developing the capacity to act have been central goals of service-learning for the past three decades, but the field has not yet fully discovered how to meet these goals. This failure is highlighted by the recent report released by AAC&U, *A Crucible Moment* (2012), which calls the present state of civic engagement a crisis of democracy and calls on higher education to respond. If colleges and universities are to develop effective civic education initiatives, they have to have good answers to our three questions.

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